

Revenge

Sometimes the thoughts creep up on me. And while I do not deliberately summon them, I find that they can provide me with a warmth I only remember from my living days. Revenge. There are so many people for me to take my vengeance upon. So many who've wronged me. Hurt me. Follow the ever so long string back to the beginning, and I always find her. The woman who turned me into the man... or perhaps monster I am today.

There have been times when I was tempted to forgive her. Throughout my time with Beth, I forgot to hate her. But the good times ended as they always do. During the bad times... and there have been so many of them... this is when her memory always comes back to me the strongest. Dominique. Edi. Whatever her name truly was doesn't really matter. She was my sire. The woman who'd recreated me the same night her companions had killed most of my friends.

In my dreams I still hear her accent-laden voice. Feel the touch of her hands and the heat of her sex. I even remember her biting me now. But I've never once forgotten waking up in that barrel at the bottom of the river.

Never.

It has taken me weeks of calling from phone booths around the city. I've called almost every gunsmith in the state. And it seems that according to the majority of them, the best of the best lives right next door in the suburb of Grand Prairie.

Just before his little store closes, I step inside. We talk. I discuss what I want. He's not really interested. Doesn't like weapons that involve anything other than hunting or target shooting. We talk some more but he remains uninterested. I show him the plans. Against his will, I can see his crinkled eyes light up with interest. He recognizes the designs of a master. I can see them burning within his mind. Knowing that the seed is well sown, I take the plans and leave.

Three nights later I return. Having built his will up again, he tells me to leave. But he sees the plans rolled up in my hands and licks his lips. The ultimate challenge for a master craftsman. Instead of talking about the plans, I ask him to join me for coffee. Reluctantly, he agrees.

While he drinks coffee in a nearby chain store, instead of the plans he is expecting to see, I pass across to him a folder. Within this folder is a rap sheet featuring the mugshot of a most unpleasant man. Behind these pages are pictures of his victims. Portraits and crime scene photos both. The last page tells the story of the man getting off on a technicality. The old man is saddened. Some of the victims undoubtedly remind him of his grandchildren. He goes to the bathroom. Probably to regain his self-control. With the prick of a silver pin, I draw forth a drop of blood. It falls into his freshly refilled coffee cup with the sound of thunder to my ears.

Looking into the reflection of the window, I see not the inside of a coffee shop but instead a huge outdoor party in a town square. Though she now has red hair instead of blonde, I recognize my sire. A murder of crows circles thrice over her head and she recognizes it for a sign. A warning most dire. But her sins are many and she doesn't know where to begin tracing

back this dark premonition so she can find its source. Hers is a dark world and a new thread of worry has entered it even as she turns away with a frown to rejoin the friends she hunts with.

Sitting back down across from me, the gunsmith's return in conjunction with her turning away ends the vision. Once more there is only a coffee shop reflected in the window. Pretending to sip coffee, I momentarily hide behind the cup as I regain my own composure and make sure my fangs are where they belong.

I look up in time to see the unease on his face. He has found the stack of folders I placed on top of the one he'd already looked at.

"Each are filled with the same story. Innocent lives destroyed to sate each of these vile creature's perverted sense of pleasure," I tell him quietly. He looks uncomfortable. And well he should.

"I've told you before...." he begins when I interrupt him.

"I know. You only make weapons for hunting," I tell him almost gently. "But you fail to realize, I *am* a hunter. The most important hunter you know. I am the hunter who will keep these twelve files from turning into twenty four. Or forty eight. Or ninety six. I am the hunter who will keep your conscience clean. I am the hunter who will make sure that these innocent dead are able to rest. I am the one who seeks out the deranged and puts them down. I am the hand of justice and in this small way you will help me. And them," I tell him with a quiet nod at the files.

He is silent for a while as he quietly sips his coffee. His troubled glance passes from the files to the rolled up plans. I don't believe he realizes that he licks his lips when his eyes cross them. Undoubtedly, he thinks of his son. Killed twenty years ago, a bystander in a bank robbery. His killer received five years in prison and was then released by court order when the jails overflowed.

I know a lot about this man, now. It pays to have friends in low places.

Drinking the last of his coffee, he puts his hands over his face and does not move for a long time. At last I hear his faint whisper.

He'll do it.

Sixty thousand dollars and a number of blood-laced drinks later, I walk into the master gunsmith's store. It has been almost a month. Tonight it will be ready. My hammer. The pathway to and one more instrument of my vengeance.

My next step in becoming a true Caitiff Nemesis.

Through talking with the old man, I have come to know my weapon even before it touches my hand. How to break it down and clean it. To care for it. Changing out barrels. To fix it in the unlikely event it should jam. How to aim it. Compensate for the little recoil there will be. Squeeze the trigger. Oh, yes. Just squeeze the trigger and let loose retribution.

Inside, I find the old man staring at it. It sits in a velvet lined box. To my eyes the heavy pistol seems almost as alive as the old man does. And he seems much more alive than he used to. Odd how an infusion of death makes life so much more vivid. With this hammer I will make many people seem more alive....

....but only for the briefest of moments.

Back in my haven, I sit down amid the books of my library. A true, if small, library now. Removing the hammer from its box, I slide in a full magazine and then ease it into the custom holster. Lost in the moment, I belt on the pistol-rig. The weight feels right. Like it belongs. I feel myself smile.

Another step along the path.

Maybe I will kill my sire when next I see her. Perhaps we will merely talk. I don't know yet. But I do know that I will be in control when we do. A stark contrast to the last time.

There are few in my new home I have left to avenge myself upon. Here, I have begun truly learning those strengths that Gilch told me about. But there is still more strength to be found within me. I know this. I feel this. My sire was almost certainly one of the Ravnos. And though I feel it, I have yet to unlock the strength of this blood. But I will. Soon.

The path of vengeance is long and I plan to ease my way down this road by soaking it and myself in blood. It is with a warm, pleasant feeling that I leave to fire the first thousand rounds through the hammer.